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History: In The Family of Social Sciences

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Abstract: Social Science is the study of man and his behaviour in society. History means the study of the past of man and society. Many researchers have tried to establish a relation between History and Social Science in their respective researches. Some scholars have agreed that History is a Social Science and some have rejected this idea.

Keywords: History, Social Science, Scholars, Social Scientists, Historians, Research

Prologue

The term 'Social Science' etymologically means the science of society. The origin of this discipline goes back from the texts and intellectual questions of classical Greek philosophers to the time of Renaissance and Enlightenment. However, as an academic discipline, it emerged in the 20th century. The term 'Social Science' was first coined in French by Mirabeau in 1767. However, it was Emile Durkheim who laid the foundations of social studies in the discipline of Sociology in 19th century. He is popularly known as the father of Social Sciences. Social Science mainly deals with human behaviour, the nature of their interactions, environments, social and cultural aspects. It is the study of people and the evolution of human behaviour through the ages. In the 1950s, the term 'Behavioural Sciences' was applied instead of Social Science, as it was related to the disciplines of human behaviour such as Anthropology and Psychology. In the 21st century, Social Science emerged as a popular academic subject. Social Science mainly has five parts- Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, Political Science and Economics. However, many scholars consider History as a part of Social Science because of the contributions made by certain part of historical research to the growth and evolution of Social Science. And for sustaining of societies, these contributions are utmost necessary.

Relation Between History And Social Science

There are many works published till now which have tried to establish a relation between History and Social Science. These works raise theoretical issues about History and the relevance of historical context in Social Science. They also raise epistemological questions about truths and historical evidence we normally avoid to answer.[1] Sociologists, Anthropologists and Political Scientists are attempting to establish the relation between the two subjects through their research. The question of the usefulness of historical research methods is also a controversial topic of discussion. The Historians often face questions like, is History really free from the biases of the time of a respective Historian? Or can we put ourselves in the shoes of a Historian to understand the usefulness of their work? To answer these questions, we must try to establish a relation between History and Social Science and discuss the contribution of the in the development of one another.

J.B Bury said "History is a Science, no less, no more". Historians all around the world created their

works by immersing themselves in a particular time and place until they fully understood the Society, Geography, Economy, culture and everyday routine of the particular time. These methods are often considered really complex by Social Scientists. R.A Seligman, a renowned Social Scientist, opined that Social Sciences are Cultural Sciences which deal with the activities of a person as a member of a group. So, from all the definitions of History and Social Science, we can say that the points of convergence of the studies are humans in a society and their activities. It was the French Anthropologist and Ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss who tried to come up with a Science that would bring together Anthropology, Political Economy and Linguistics, for which he found History appropriate. He faced severe rejections for this attempt.

History, as a subject, accepts lessons from its relative disciplines. This subject not only shows substance of the past but depict their relevance in present day life too. Historical study has a method which seeks to draw objective conclusions. It gathers data and draws conclusions. Social Science, on the other hand, is concerned with both objectiveness and subjectiveness. History shows how people lived in the past and tries to provide insights into the contemporary societal and political problems, for which, association of Social Science is needed. A difference in time orientation was always there; Social Science studies an individual in the present whereas a Historian is primarily concerned with human activities in the past and reaches his objective through valid historical evidences. Several concepts of Social Science like social change, social control, social mobility, social identity etc. are borrowed by Historians for their research work. History has evolved so much that this subject has a new vision for the society after being associated with Sociology, Psychology, Linguistics, Demography, Statistics and so on.

History has always been a sine qua non of Social Science. Great philosophers and scholars such as Claude Ake understood the role of History in the practice and success of the discipline known as Social Science. Adebayo says that a Historian borrows concepts and research methods of Social Science in order to contribute in enhancing and evolving historical scholarship. Important aspects of Social Science such as theories and generalizations depend on History for the better understanding and portrayal of an individual and his activities in society in. According to Alagoa, a Nigerian scholar, the theories and generalizations supplied by Social Science explains the operations and works of a society. When it comes to contributing in solving the social issues, from local to global, the role of Social Science is undisputed. And for this, historical concepts like changing character of historical evidence and development of new techniques are much needed to study the socio-economic developments and social problems.

A product of the Social Science Movement of 19th century was the subject History. It is related closely with all the Social Sciences. Political Science has an ionic bond with History. According to Professor Seeley, “History without Political Science has no fruit and Political Science without History has no root.” History not only deals with the history of political processes but with major political concepts too e.g. political institutions, administration, bureaucracy, war, peace, tactics and so on. The link between History and Economics can’t be undermined. A Historian should always have a primary knowledge of Economics to study and understand a particular time and place in the past. Karl Marx and Adam Smith refers to Economic History as an essential field as it adds importance and puts dimensions to Economics. Major researches are held in Social Science by studying History with Sociology. August Comte, an important Sociologist, is also an important figure in historical studies. Both the subjects have the same objective – to study the role of man in society, but differ in regard to their approach. Sociology helps History to study change in social processes. A Historian must have an idea of Psychology as it shares a close relation to History.

The elementary understanding of Psychology helps in studying the motives of man in a particular time in History, as an individual or a group. As proven multiple times, Anthropology can't be separated from History. The relation between these two disciplines developed in 19th century. Many scholars consider Anthropology as parallel to Historiography as both aim to understand different societies or cultures and portray them in relation to present society.

A primary role in establishing a relation between History and Social Science is played by a group of American Historians known as Pluralists. They have contributed much to the reconciliation of History and Social Science. They came out of the stereotypical ways of studying these subjects and formed new ways of research. Hays, Richard Hofstadter, Cochran and Potter are some eminent Pluralists. They rejected old cliché learning and said that knowledge rests upon utilitarianism.[2] It was the Pluralist group who said that Historians could use several concepts of Social Science for the development of historical research.

Issues In Including History In Social Science

There are many issues which become hurdles in forming relations between History and Social Science. The issues mainly arise because of the differences in the approach of a Historian and a Social Scientist. According to scholars, the approach of a Historian is humanistic and the approach of a Social Scientist is utilitarian.[3] R.G Collingwood, an English Philosopher and Historian, said that Historians know about the past by actually putting themselves in the shoes of historical figures unlike Social Scientists, who study and analyze a social phenomenon neutrally. It can be said that a Historian is concerned about the past and a Social Scientist is concerned with the future. Both Historians and Social Scientists study the past but their objectives are not the same. Social Scientists study the past with a view of finding patterns which will allow them to predict the next. However, Historians have no such intentions, because, like the future, the past is quite uncertain too.

The resistance of Historians in becoming Social Scientists form a big problem in including History in Social Science. History is the only subject associated with Social Science which builds so slowly, as the traditional Historians are resistant to accept the new methods of Social Science, new types of data and the goals of the discipline. At some point of time, the Historians face disapproval of other scholars on the ground that sometimes their works become too dependent on secondary sources. However, it cannot be denied that the survival and relevance of History depends on its association with Social Science. Through case studies all around the world, it has been found that of all the fields, the History of Science is the best supported field with lots of funding. The supported fields other than History of Science are mainly Behavioural and Social Sciences. So, many fields related to the discipline of History lack funds resulting in the low morale of other Historians.

Possible Solutions To The Issues

If nature gives problems, it provides their solutions too. Naturally, there are several ways in which development of both History and Social Science are possible when they are associated with each other. The stereotypical and orthodox methods of historical research are sometimes fruitless in the context of 21st century. Social Scientific methods should be used more in historical research to provide more neutral researches. The Department of both History and Social Science, in every academic institution should build joint courses related to War Studies, Strategy, Philosophy of historical figures, Historical Psychology, Social Changes, Cultural Studies, and many more. These courses should provide technological concepts and concepts related to Social Science. Also, there should be more availability of funds for the study of different fields in History.

Economic and moral support both by the public and government is needed to accomplish this goal. Karl Marx insisted on erasing the differences traditionally made between Social Science and History.

If this is followed, the inclusion of History in Social Science and the development of the respective fields are possible.

In Indian context, there is a change in both the teaching and study of History in academic institutions. From only practicing the study of the History of kings, queens and their empire, the focus is slightly shifted in studying New Social History, History of Society, Subaltern Studies and Local History.[4] The pioneers of New Social History and Subaltern Studies in India are Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Partha Chatterjee.

Conclusion:

Historical studies from late 19th century did not contribute so much in the development of Social Science. However, the present has a different story. In the present time, both fields play their vital roles in each other's development and need each other to contribute better in the demanding studies of man and his activities in the society. History always provides answers to the questions like what happened? When did it happen? How did it happen? To provide the most suitable answers to these questions, Historians must conduct their research like Social Scientists. The association of Social Science with History makes History more exciting, relevant, increases its value and makes it richer. The exchange of knowledge runs in reciprocal paths in this context. Although History is always considered as a taker, it has also played the role of a giver too. Each and every study of Social Science would not be complete if there was the absence of historical records. Social Science requires a relevant historical component to achieve research goals. A Historian uses Social Scientific concepts and methods for his research and a Social Scientist uses a Historian's sources and historical orientation to meet his goals. The study of man is a long and continuous process. Contributions of both Social Science and Humanities are needed to study man and society, and History acts as the bridge between the two. Not all historical researches have been conducted using methodologies of Social Science till now, naturally bias existed in many ways in those works. It has been quite a tough job for the scholars to deduce the neutral part out of those works. All credit goes to the Social and Subaltern Historians for whom we got to be introduced to subjects such as Subaltern Studies. We know that what is relevant now, will be relevant and studied in the future as History of our time. So, if Historians become more dedicated towards conducting researches using Social Scientific methods and towards studying social issues, we could contribute towards the creation of a scientific, neutral and unbiased History for the future generations.

Notes:

1. Epistemology: The philosophical study of the nature, origin and limits of human knowledge is known as Epistemology. It is one of the four main branches of philosophy long with metaphysics, logic, and ethics, and nearly every great philosopher has contributed in its evolution.
2. Utilitarianism: Utilitarianism is a tradition generated from the ideas of English philosophers and economists Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. According to this tradition, an action is right if it tends to promote happiness or pleasure and wrong if it tends to produce unhappiness or pain.
3. Humanism: Humanism is a system of education that originated in northern Italy during the 13th and 14th centuries. The term is applied to a variety of beliefs, and philosophies that gives a central position to the human realm.
4. Subaltern Studies: Subaltern Studies deals with the study of the neglected and subordinated classes in History, like peasants, tribes, labourers and other oppressed groups.

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